

LITTLE

The Reputation of Beaumont and
Fletcher in the Seventeenth Century

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THE REPUTATION OF BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER
IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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BY

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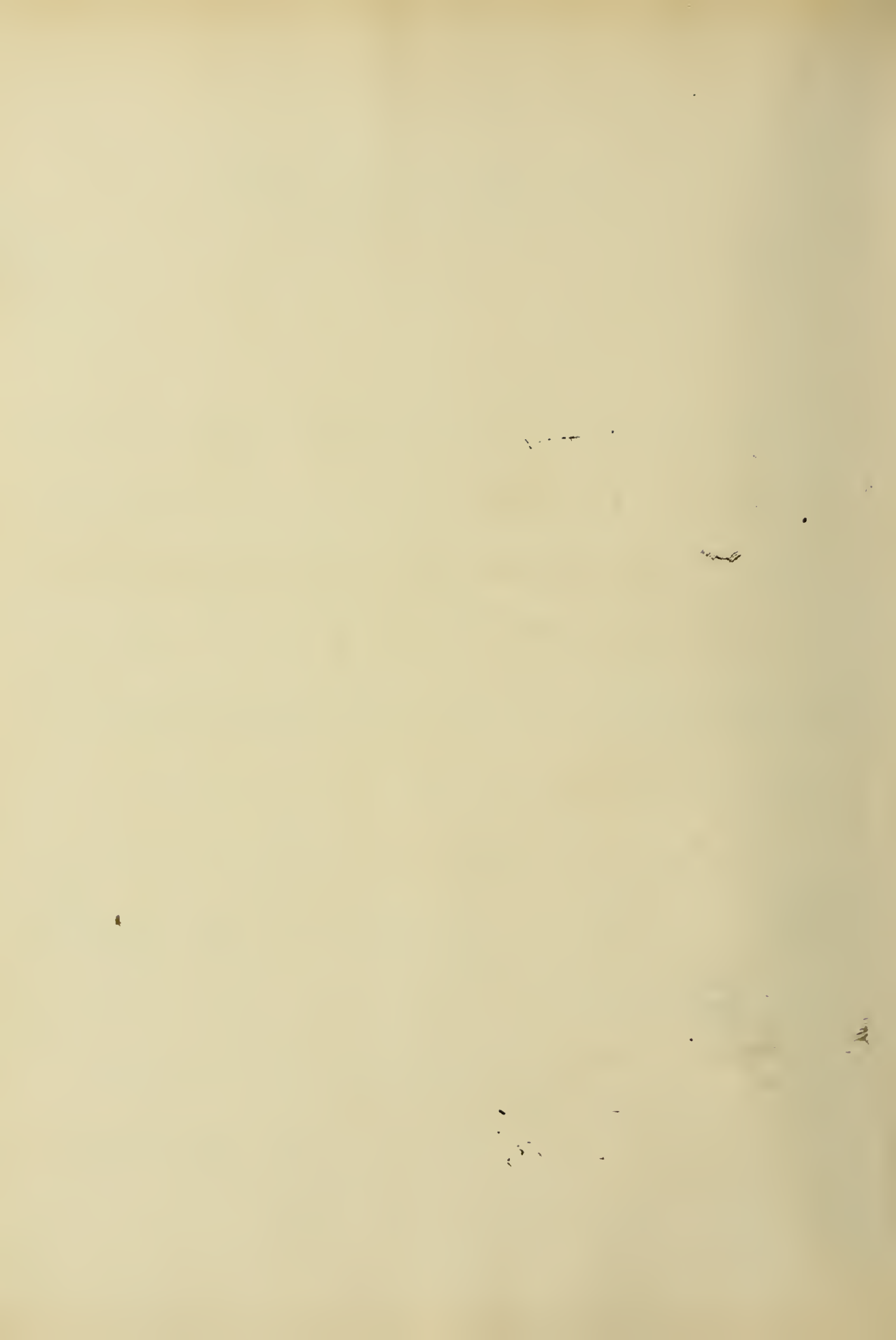
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THE REPUTATION OF BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER
IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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C H A P T E R I

THE REPUTATION OF BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER AMONG THE THEATRE-GOERS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

In this chapter I propose to determine to some degree, the position that Beaumont and Fletcher held as popular dramatists in the seventeenth century, and also in what branch of the drama they were at that time supposed to have succeeded best. I shall attempt the first mainly by comparisons with other dramatists, and the second by means of the relative demand for the public presentation of their tragedies, tragi-comedies, and comedies.

The first ten years of the seventeenth century seem to have been trial years, years of experiment, for Beaumont and Fletcher as dramatists. About the end of this decade they found their stride in a play called Philaster, or Love Lies A-Bleeding. The records of the early years of the century are very scattering and incomplete, but as nearly as Langbaine could determine from the materials at hand in 1691, the tragi-comedy, Philaster, "was the first Play that brought these Excellent Authors in Esteem."¹ One of the best modern

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1. An Account of the English Dramatic Poets, Gerard Langbaine-Oxford, 1691, I:213.

Beaumont and Fletcher authorities¹ has established the year 1611 as that of the first presentation of Philaster. Langbaine added, in 1691, that Philaster was a play, "which has always been acted with success; and has been the diversion of the stage even in these days." Although these dates are far apart, they are valuable as at least showing the popularity of a play at the extremes of a century. A few intervening dates are available: Philaster was published separately in 1620, 1622, 1628, 1634, 1639, and 1652;² it may also be found in the 1679 folio edition of their works (p 21). The great number of editions of Beaumont and Fletcher plays indicates the popularity of those plays upon the stage: because authors, instead of printing their own works, sold them to the theatre management; and that management, composed largely of actors, frowned upon printing them, because they thought it would take spectators from the theatre.³ In 1636-7 Philaster was presented at court,⁴ and in the Theatre Royal in 1668,⁵ 1673,⁶ and 1695.⁷

Less is known of the early history of The Maid's Tragedy, but it must also have appeared before 1611, for in

* * * * *

1. A.H.Thorndike, The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakespeare, Boston, 1901, p, 40.
2. Fleay - Chronicle of the English Drama - London - 1891 - 1:165. (Egerton - Theatrical Remembrancer - London - 1788 - gives 1622, 1634, 1652.)
3. Malone, and Langbaine - Geneste - Some Account of the English Stage - Bath - 1832 - I:8.
4. Collier, J. - The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare; and Annals of the Stage to the Restoration London - 1831 - II:80.
5. Geneste, Index.
6. Ibid., I:83.
7. Fleay - Chronicle . . . I:165. Egerton - Theatrical Remembrancer, p., 40.

that year someone registered an anonymous play called The Second Maiden's Tragedy. The Maid's Tragedy was printed in 1619, 1622, 1630, 1638, 1641, 1650, and 1661.¹ It was revived after the Restoration, and presented in 1661,² 1666,³ 1682,⁴ 1706,⁵ 1707,⁶ 1710,⁷ and continued to be frequently presented throughout the first half of the eighteenth century. It is acknowledged to have been frequently acted with great applause⁸ after its revival about 1661. Although suppressed by Charles the Second, (probably because of his fear of another Evadne who might follow that heroine's example of murdering her royal lover), this play was altered in the last act by Mr. Waller, and revived again in 1682. It was then brought on the stage with 'Universal approbation.'⁹

The Tragi-Comedy A King and No King is another of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays whose popularity started early in the century and lasted late. The dates of its first presentation vary from 1608 to 1611, but none later than 1611 are suggested. It was printed in 1618, 1619, 1625, 1631, 1639, 1655

* * * * *

1. Fleay - Chronicle . . . I:165. Egerton - Theatrical Remembrancer, p., 40.

2. Samuel Pepys - Diary and Correspondence . . . from the fifth London edition - Philadelphia - 1855 - I:184.

3. "Pepys saw it December 7" - Geneste, I:66.

4. Ibid., I:335.

5. Ibid., II:357.

6. Ibid., II:391.

7. Ibid., II:440.

8. Langbaine - Dramatic Poets, p., 212; Jacob, Poetical Register, I:106; Preface to 1711 Edition of Works of B.&F.

9. Jacob - Poetical Register, I:106.

and 1661.¹ The presentations were 1608,² (to 1611), 1636-7 (at court),³ 1644, (at court),⁴ 1661,⁵ 1682,⁶ 1683.⁷

Cupid's Revenge, another Tragedy, was printed in 1615, 1630, 1635,⁸ presented at Court in 1624, again in 1636-7,⁹ and revived in 1668.¹⁰ Geneste says that it was a good tragedy, but that it was ridiculous.¹¹

To pile up evidence of this sort is easy, but probably not interesting. Almost all the above facts, however, could be applied to Rollo, Valentinian, The Humorous Lieutenant, (revived, and acted twelve times successively in 1663),¹² The Island Princess, Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,¹³ A Wife for a Month,¹⁴ The Scornful Lady,¹⁵ and Wit Without Money.¹⁶

* * * * *

1. Fleay - Chronicle - I: (Egerton's Theatrical Remembrancer p., 40 gives only 1619, 1631, 1655).
2. 1608 - Ibid., I:192. -- 1611 - Collier, Annals, I:28 (Introduction).
3. Ibid., II:79.
4. Ibid., II:106.
5. Marbh 13, 1661 - King and No King, 'Well acted' - Pepys, Diary, I.
6. Geneste - Some Account -- X:Index.
7. Geneste - Some Account -- X:Index.
8. Egerton - Theatrical Remembrancer, p., 40; Fleay Chronicle, I:165.
9. Collier - Annals, I:444, and II:79.
10. Geneste - Some Account I:88.
11. Geneste - Some Account I:88.
12. Davies - Dramatic Miscellanies - London - 1785 - p., 404.
13. The tendency of the 17th century is suggested by the record of this play in the 18th. Geneste shows it to have been presented at least once each year from 1700 to 1800, excepting only 15. and in 18 of those years to have been presented twice, or more.
14. A Wife for a Month - "A Tragi-Comedy in my poor judgment well worth reviving" - Langbaine - I:216. Geneste (X:Index) shows it to have been revived six years after Langbaine wrote this.
15. A count in Geneste shows The Scornful Lady to have been presented in twenty-two of the thirty-four years from 1702 to 1736.
16. The call for this play lasted well into the 18th century.

Of the twelve plays just named, six are tragi-comedies, four tragedies, and but two comedies. They were chosen with reference to popular presentation, regardless of the branch of the drama to which they belonged. As will be shown later, Beaumont and Fletcher had fourteen plays presented at Court between 1612 and 1644. Six of these were comedies, five were tragi-comedies, and but three tragedies. Of course these figures are not extensive enough to determine anything definitely, but so far as they go they favor comedy and tragi-comedy. But this was before the theatres were closed. The tendency after the Restoration was somewhat the same. In a group of twenty-one plays revived between 1663 and 1682, I find fourteen comedies and seven tragedies.¹ In another group of fifteen, Beaumont and Fletcher had six, two tragi-comedies, two comedies, and two tragedies.² Still another group, of eight plays by the same authors, is equally divided between comedies and tragi-comedies.³ Only nineteen Shakesperian plays were revived between 1660 and 1700.⁴

* * * * *

1. See footnote 5, p., 11.

2. Ibid.

3. Geneste- Some Account . . . I:31.

4. Shakespere plays revived, 1660-1700:

Tragedies and Tragical Histories; Henry VIII, Geneste, I:51; Macbeth, Ibid., 53; Othello, Ibid., 93; Troilus and Cressida, Ibid., 267; Richard III, Ibid., 293; Henry VI (First part), Ibid., 303; Henry VI (Second part), Ibid., 304; King Lear, Ibid., 308; Cymbeline, Ibid., 331; Julius Caesar, Langbaine, I:455; Hamlet, Ibid., 457; Timon of Athens, Ibid., 465.

Comedies; The Tempest, Geneste, I:77; Henry IV (Part first), Ibid., 339; Merry Wives of Windsor, Ibid., 339; Midsummer Night's Dream, Ibid., II:25; Taming of the Shrew, Ibid., 32.

Here the advantage is strikingly in favor of tragedy, for only five were comedies, and fourteen either tragedies or tragical histories. With Jonson's revived plays, however, the balance of favor is again with comedy, for of nine plays revived, seven were comedies.¹ The total number of Beaumont and Fletcher plays revived after the Restoration has tragedy in the minority. They rank as follows; Comedies 16, Tragi-Comedies 9, Tragedies 7.² Beaumont and Fletcher's lighter work, comedy and tragi-comedy, made the greatest appeal to the later seventeenth century audiences.

As has just been shown, the same thing seems to have been true of Jonson, though perhaps his fame rests as much upon his masques as upon his comedy. That he was the best writer of masques has almost never been questioned. From 1600 to the time of his death in 1637, his masques formed a considerable means of entertainment at court.³

Besides having a great many plays on the London stages ~~Shakespeare~~ certainly had some presented at court, but definite data is not now at hand. To us, he seems, in general, better in tragedy than in comedy, and this appears to have worked against him in the seventeenth century,

* * * * *

1, Jonson's revived plays, (1660-1700): Tragedies; Catiline, Geneste, I:84; Sejanus, Ibid., 345.

Comedies; Silent Woman, Ibid., 50; Bartholomew Fair, Ibid; Alchemist, Ibid; The Fox, Ibid., 56; Every Man in His Humour, Langbaine, I:290; Every Man out of His Humour, Ibid; The Widow (Jonson, Fletcher, and Middleton), Ibid., II:298.

2. See footnotes 2 and 3 p., 13.

3. Langbaine - (I:287) - Credits Jonson with 27 masques presented before his death. See also footnote 4 p., 13.

especially after the Restoration. Geneste remarks that the taste in tragedy, after the Restoration, was abominable, largely because Charles had taken a liking to the French style in tragedy.¹ Shirley, however, in the Prologue to the Sisters, (probably acted in 1640 - Geneste, 1:426) shows that Shakespere was not in the greatest demand even before the theatres were closed:

"You see

What audience we have, what company
To Shakespere comes? whose mirth did once beguile
Dull hours, and buskin'd made even sorrow smile,
So lovely were the wounds, that men would say
They could endure the bleeding a whole day:
He has but few friends lately."

In 1667,² Shirley again mentioned the same neglect of Shakespere;

" That which the world called wit in Shakespere's age,
Is laugh'd at, as improper for our Stage".

Thirteen years later, in 1680, a Satire shows that Shakespere is still unpopular;³

"At every shop while Shakespere's lofty stile
Neglected lies, to mice and worms a spoil,
Gilt on the back, just smoking from the press
The apprentice shews you D'Urfey's Hudibras,
Crown's Mask, bound up with Settle's choicest labours,
And promises some new essay of Babor's."

* * * * *

1. Geneste, 1:427. 2. Ibid., 1:426. 3. Ibid., 1:426.

While these lines may be, perhaps, somewhat extreme, yet they seem justified when we remember that Shakespere had but nineteen plays revived, and Jonson but nine, while, as is shown later, Beaumont and Fletcher had thirty-two. Perhaps Dryden was generalizing, but he was not far wrong, when he wrote of Beaumont and Fletcher, "Their plays are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage: two of theirs being acted through the year for one of Shakespere's or Jonson's: the reason is, because there is a certain gaiety in their comedies, and pathos in their more serious plays which suits generally with all men's humours."¹

Something has already been said of plays acted at Court. There was a very close relation between these presentations and the public performances, in that the court performances were often taken by the public as sufficient guarantee of merit, while the king sometimes asked actors to present at court, plays in which they were pleasing the general audiences. The figures are not complete enough to warrant one in drawing definite conclusions, but in themselves they are worthy of notice: eight of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays were presented, either "at court", or "before the King and Queen," in 1636-7, and fourteen altogether between 1612 and

* * * * *

1. Dryden - Essay of Dramatic Poesy - W.P.Ker - Essays of John Dryden - Oxford - 1900, 1:81.

1644.¹

The Puritan sentiment against the Drama made itself felt in various ways before 1634, but not until that time did it become strong enough to attract a great deal of attention. Then Prynne attacked the stage very violently in his well known Histrion-Mastix. Although he was punished very severely, in a public place, the party element which he represented grew constantly stronger until it succeeded in closing the theatres eight years later. The acting drama, as it had existed earlier in the century, then disappeared until 1660.

After the Restoration in 1660 a host of old and new plays and playwrights sprang up. It is but natural that revived plays should be first in evidence, for events had moved rapidly when finally started towards the Restoration, and there had not been time for new playwrights to appear. Then too, many men had lived through the Protectorate who could recall the glories of the old plays in the days of James and Charles I.

* * * * *

1. Colliers Annals supplies this information:

The plays presented in 1636 and 1637 were; Knight of the Burning Pestle, II:73; Cupid's Revenge, I:444; Rollo, II:79; Philaster, II:80; A Wife for a Month, II:79; Elder Brother, II:79; Wit Without Money, II:79; King and No King, II:79.

The other plays presented between 1612 and 1642 were; The Captain, 1612-1613, Fleay, Chronicle, I:195; The Loyal Subject, 1633, Collier Annals, II:56; Cupid's Revenge, 1624, Ibid., I:444; King and No King, 1644, Ibid., I:106; The Scornful Lady, 1641-2 (the only play acted at Christmas time) Ibid., II:103; The Tamer Tamed, 1633, Fleay, Chronicle, I:198.

It will be noted that the date given for A King and No King is two years later than the closing of the theatres in London. In as much as it was a Puritanical sentiment which had closed them, the title of the play (King and No King) is interesting. This performance was interrupted by the Sheriffs of London.

Actors were still living, who, as will be shown later, had been famous, before the theatres were closed, in well-known plays of Shakespere, Beaumont and Fletcher and others.

The Rhodes Company, which was established soon after General Monck returned in 1650-60, acted the following plays before 1661: (those starred are not by Beaumont and Fletcher):¹

The Loyal Subject
The Maid in the Mill
The Wild Goose Chase
The Spanish Curate
The Mad Lover
*Pericles
A Wife for a Month
Rule a Wife and Have a Wife
A Woman's Prize
*Unfortunate Lovers
*Aglaura
*The Changeling
*The Bondman

Of these thirteen plays chosen as most likely to please the audiences, eight were written by Beaumont and Fletcher. Pepys saw eighteen plays between August 1660 and April 1663, five of which were Beaumont and Fletcher's work.² Shakespere furnished amusement for him three times,³ and no other author so many times as that. Of three plays noted by Pepys as performed at the Theatre Royal in 1666 two were chosen from the list of Beaumont and Fletcher.⁴ In 1667 these dramatists had two plays revived at this play-house, while Shakespere had three.⁵ Twelve plays listed for the

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1. Geneste - Some Account - I:31.
2. Ibid., 1:35.
3. Ibid., 1:35.
4. The Maid's Tragedy, The Scornful Lady - Ibid., 1:65.
5. The Custom of the Country, The Chances, The Taming of the Shrew, Merry Wives of Windsor, Henry IV., Ibid., 1:67.

Theatre Royal in 1668 include four by Beaumont and Fletcher,¹ while 1669 gives but one.² During the winter of this year this theatre was burned, and the company was forced to move to another building. Old Lincoln's Inn Fields House seems to have been empty, and here the Theatre Royal Company opened as soon as possible.³ It is worthy of note in this connection that they chose a Beaumont and Fletcher play, Wit Without Money, for their first night performance. The following year, 1673, shows but one play, Philaster, from our authors. Indeed, Geneste does not show them on the stage again until 1684. Such ostracism, after such decided preference for a number of years, leads to the conjecture that the records were either lost, or faulty, rather than that Beaumont and Fletcher lost their popularity. Beginning with 1684 and continuing through 1690 one of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays was presented each year except 1686, 1688, and 1689.⁴

Downes gives a list⁵ of plays revived by various companies from 1663 to 1682. In this total of twenty-one, Jonson has six, Beaumont and Fletcher four, Shirley three, and Shakespere but two. The stock plays of the King's Company⁶

* * * * *

1. The Wild Goose Chase, The Sea Voyage, Philaster, The Faithful Shepherdess--Geneste, Some Account, I:80.

2. Island Princess, Ibid., 1:132.

3. Ibid., 1:132.

4. In 1685 two plays: The Sea Voyage, Ibid., 1:443; Rollo, Ibid., 1446.

5. Ibid., 1:339.

6. Ibid., 1:334.

for the same dates, give six to Beaumont and Fletcher, three to Jonson, and three to Shakespere. The total number of this repertoire was fifteen, and for our authors (who must be regarded as one) to have six, is well worth the notice. Even regarding them as separate authors, and dividing the plays equally between them, we find them placed on a par with Jonson and Shakespere for almost a quarter of the century. This, of course, is limited to one play-house, but it must be remembered that at this time there were but two of any importance.¹ To this list Langbaine adds eight more, acted² by the King's Company at this time. Of these, four are the work of Beaumont and Fletcher. There is some question as to whether or not one of these four was really acted at that time. Granting that it was not, we still have, by adding the lists of Downes and Langbaine, twenty-two plays revived in nineteen years, With Beaumont and Fletcher heading the list with nine.

In 1682 the two theatres which had been competing for some years, were consolidated, and after this, as one writer said, "the revival of old plays so engrossed the study of the house, that the Poets lay dormant, and a new play could hardly

* * * * *

1. I have found mention of but two plays, or theatres outside of London. Langbaine (Dramatic Poets, I:213) says of The Night Walker (a comedy by Beaumont and Fletcher), " a Comedy which I have seen acted by the King's servants, with great applause, both in the city and in the country." The city (London) was very decidedly the home of plays and players. The comical part of this play (Midsummer Night's Dream) is printed separately in quarto, and used to be acted at Bartholomew Fair, and other markets in the country by strolers under the Title of Bottom the Weaver. - Langbaine, I:460.

2. Geneste, Some Account, I:347.

get admittance."¹ Jacob names twenty of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays which were revived between 1660 and 1700,² and a count of Geneste and of Pepys adds twelve more.³ To have had thirty-two of these fifty-four plays revived within forty years is a striking percentage. I have already shown (page 6) that the lighter work of these authors was the most prominent in the seventeenth century. Perhaps this was but a natural outgrowth of the high favor in which the Masque was held in the early years of that century.

It was noted above that Jonson had a great many masques presented in the early seventeenth century. Masques were very popular at that time,⁴ but they were so expensive that common people could neither afford to stage, nor witness them. Their main characteristics seem to have been brilliant pageants, bright costumes, dancing, and expensive scenic effects designed by men who were not only carpenters, but architects, as well. The whole effect was that of elaborate display. The playwrights who could best put this sort of

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1. Powell in the preface to his play called Treacherous Brothers Geneste - Some Account, I:404.
2. Jacob - Poetical Register - I:104.
3. The twelve plays thus brought together, are: Beggar's Bush - 1660, Nov., 20 - Pepys, Diary; Cupid's Revenge - 1668 - Geneste, I:88; Custom of the Country - 1667 - Ibid., II:229; Loyal Subject - 1660, Aug., 18 - Pepys, Diary; Philaster - 1668 - Geneste - X:Index; Rollo - 1661 - Pepys, Diary, I:163; Rule a Wife, and Have a Wife - 1660 - Geneste, I:31; Scornful Lady - 1661, Feb., 12 - Pepys, Diary; Tamer Tamed - 1660 - Ibid., I:35; Wife for a Month - 1697 - Geneste - X:Index; Wild Goose Chase - 1660 - Ibid., I:31; Mad Lover - 1661 - Feb., 9 - Pepys, Diary. Of these, six are tragi-comedies, four comedies, and two tragedies. Jacob's list, mentioned above contains twelve comedies, four tragedies, three tragi-comedies, and one tragical history.
4. There were forty-two masques performed at Court between the years 1603 and 1642. - Thorndike - Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher. p., 29.

thing into the regular drama were sure to please their audiences. As we have Jonson's authority for it that Beaumont was a good masque writer,¹ and as Fletcher had shown somewhat the same ability in his Faithful Shepherdess, we are not surprised that together they should have produced plays containing masque elements.^{2,3} While Beaumont and Fletcher seem to have been the first to incorporate the masque or masque elements into the regular drama, they were by no means the last. Following the same method as theirs in The Maid's Tragedy (Act I Scene II), Shakespere placed the same sort of thing in, for instance, The Tempest (IV), and The Winter's Tale (IV; IV).

This predilection for masques has a direct bearing in another way upon the dramas of the period. The masques had no individual characters standing out prominently. As there were no characters recurring in masque after masque there were no national characters developed by this means. The interest lay in the action, in the effect as a whole. The masque elements seem to have had somewhat the same effect upon many of the dramas. At anyrate Beaumont and Fletcher wrote their plays very largely in this manner.² Their characters were types, rather than individuals such as Falstaff, or Othello. There was continued action as in the masque,⁴ and this seems

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1. Jonson told Drummond that 'next himself only Fletcher (probably a mistake for Beaumont) and Chapman could make a mask' Thorndike - Influence of B & F p., 132.

2. Distinct masque elements are to be found in eighteen of their plays - Ibid., p., 132.

3. Beaumont first introduced the fashion of having 'various characters and contumes, or anti-masques, Ibid., p., 45.

4. Chapter 8 of Thorndike's Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakespere gives a rather complete discussion of the whole question of their more popular plays, with special reference to plot, characterization, style, and stage effect.

to have been the thing desired by the audiences of the time. They cared little for probability; they were ready to respond to an exciting situation, or a beautiful scene, with little thought of its location, or its probability. Thorndike says that, "even from our modern point of view, it is easy to find qualities in many of their plays (Beaumont and Fletcher's), such as their variety of situations and surprising climaxes, which make them better acting plays, greater stage successes even than Shakespere's."¹

The hold of the Court, of Fashion, upon the people of London was very strong. Our authors saw and took advantage of this in choosing their characters. Even their worst villains are men of noble blood. The people who could not go to court wished to flatter themselves that they knew something about the customs and usages of Kings, Queens and Courtiers, and so were anxious to see representations of court life. The fact that Beaumont and Fletcher were both perfectly at home in polite society, and could interpret it to a nicety, had much to do with their extreme popularity throughout their own, the seventeenth century.

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1. Thorndike - Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakespere page three.

CHAPTER II.

THE REPUTATION OF BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER AMONG THE ACTORS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

A list of the leading actors appearing in Shakespeare's plays before 1623, was made out by the editors of a folio edition of his works published at that time.¹ Of these actors, numbering twenty-six, fourteen appear more or less prominently in Beaumont and Fletcher plays between the years 1594 and 1642.² In his Memoirs of the Actors,¹ Mr. Collier purports to deal with Shakespeare, but he finds the work of these same actors so interwoven with other playwrights, especially Beaumont, Fletcher and Jonson, that the following table is easily gathered from the material which he gives there; (perhaps it favors Beaumont and Fletcher too much, but it stands as it was collected from Collier's pages). The record of Shakespeare plays for each actor is naturally not given, because at the beginning of the article Collier stated that these men were among the twenty-six most prominent actors of Shakespeare parts. It is rather striking, however, that he should have mentioned so many Beaumont and Fletcher plays in which they did appear, and that he should have named so few of Jonson's. It surely seems almost certain that at the time

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1. John Hemmings and Henry Condell in a Folio of Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies; found in Shakespeare Society Publications, I:VIII, Introduction to Memoirs of Actors.

2. F.G.Fleay, Shakespeare Manual, p., 114-115.

when these men were acting, Beaumont and Fletcher plays were more noticed than were those of Jonson.

ACTORS	PLAYWRIGHTS		
	B & F.	JONSON	SHAKESPERE
Richard Burbage	3*	7	12
Henry Condell	8	? ⁴	?
John Lowin	3*	5	1?
William Ostler	3*	? ²	?
Nat Field	Several	? ³	?
John Underwood	16* ¹	? ⁴	?
Nic Tooley	14	2	-
William Ecclestone	12	? ²	?
Robert Benfield	11*	?	?
Richard Robinson	4	2	?
John Shancke	3	?	?
John Rice	1	?	?
Joseph Taylor	2*	3? ⁵	2
Alexander Cooke ²	?	? ⁴	?

† = No record.

* = Incomplete.

1. First Presentation.

2. At least one - The Captain, 1679 folio edition Beaumont and Fletcher's Works, p., 534.

That this is by no means final is evident by the number of asterisks and question-marks below, but that many of the men were even more important in Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, is made certain by Collier's remarks about them. Of several he says that they were important original actors in Beaumont and Fletcher parts, that they appeared in a great many of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, or that it is not known just how many they did play in.

In his Shakespeare Manual (p 114-115), Fleay gives some tables which are interesting to the student of Beaumont and Fletcher. With the purpose of tabulating Elizabethan actors he went to old plays with lists of actors attached. Perhaps Beaumont and Fletcher were regarded as enough more important than Jonson or Shakespeare so that the records of the

actors in their plays were more regularly and faithfully kept; or perhaps Fleay had more complete records of their plays; or perhaps it was mere accident: but, the fact remains, that his table of the Chamberlain's Company actors is determined by the use of eighteen plays, one by Shakespere, six by Jonson, and seven by Beaumont and Fletcher; while that of the King's Company is based upon eighteen plays, thirteen of which were written by Beaumont and Fletcher. In the first named company he places thirty-seven men, of whom five appeared in Shakespere's one play, just mentioned, sixteen in Jonson's six, and fifteen in Beaumont and Fletcher's seven plays, all between 1594 and 1616; in the King's Company he places thirty-four men, fifteen of whom appear in Beaumont and Fletcher's plays between 1619 and 1642. Of the fifteen in the first named company, ten names agree with the first ten gathered from Collier's Memoirs. Of those in the second group, seven are found also in Collier, and five of them are duplicates of five in the ten just named. By referring to the table above, it will be seen that the ten men thus duplicated by Collier and Fleay, are Burbage, Condell, Lowin, Ostler, Field, Underwood, Tooley, Eccleston, Benfield, and Robinson. In the King's Company group of Fleay, Lowin, Underwood, Tooley, Benfield and Robinson are the five duplicated, with Shancke and Rice, added as of minor importance.

The 1679 folio edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's Works has the actor's names prefixed to twenty-five of their plays. The names below are those appearing most often, and the accompanying numbers indicate the number of plays in

which each appeared:

*** Lowin - - - - 21	Pollard - - - 8
*** Benfield- - - 18	** Condell - - - 7
* Taylor- - - - 18	** Burbage - - - 6
*** Underwood - - 18	** Field - - - - 6
*** Tooley- - - - 14	Holcomb - - - 6
Sharp - - - - 13	** Ostler- - - - 3
** Egglestone - -	*** Robinson- - - 3
(Ecclestone)- 11	Thomson - - - 3
Birch - - - - 8	*** Shancke - - - 2

Seventeen others appeared in one play each.

(Note; The twelve which have one or more stars are also found in Collier's Memoirs list of prominent Shakespere actors. Those double starred as well are also found in Fleay's Chamberlain's Company list. Those triple starred appear also in his King's Company list. It will be noted that Taylor, an important Beaumont and Fletcher actor, according to this 1679 Folio, is marked incomplete in the Collier table above.)

It seems evident from this incomplete data that at least a dozen actors, of those prominent in the first forty years of the seventeenth century, must depend, in considerable measure, for their reputation, upon the plays and characters of Beaumont and Fletcher. Still another authority for the high standing of the authors just named is found in the 1711 edition of the Works of Beaumont and Fletcher. Among the thirty-five there named (p., XX - Preface to the Edition of 1711), as being "the principal Actors who perform'd in Beaumont's and Fletcher's Plays," every man in the two groups above is included. By calling thirty-five men 'principal actors' in Beaumont and Fletcher plays, the editor of those works surely meant to suggest that all of them were well known in those parts. This considerably increases our own estimate of twelve men earning lasting applause through portrayal of the characters of Beaumont and Fletcher.

Again we come to the same break in the dramatic activity of the century - the establishment of the Common-

wealth. After the Restoration, as has been seen before, the stage rose very quickly into a position of great importance. But since it is not so much the purpose of this work to draw comparisons of Elizabethan and Restoration dramatists, as to find the relative standing of Beaumont and Fletcher with regard to other Elizabethan dramatists, we make no attempt at complete data of the Restoration actors. We remark only two or three things about a few of them.

The peer, perhaps, of all Restoration actors was Thomas Betterton. According to the Dictionary of National Biography, his first success was in Beaumont and Fletcher plays. Betterton's biographer, Gildon, says in 1710, that of seventy-four plays in which he "made some considerable figure", eleven were by Beaumont and Fletcher, and ten by Shakespere.¹ In Betterton's experience, then, Beaumont and Fletcher more than hold their own with Shakespere.

Of course the Restoration actors and actresses spent a large portion of their time in Restoration plays, but there seems always to have been some room for our twin authors. Nell Gwyn, favorite and mistress of Charles II, highly popular with Restoration audiences, played in Philaster, King and No King, and The Humorous Lieutenant.² Mrs. Ann Marshall, for some years the leading actress in the King's Company, played in one of Shakespere's, one of Jonson's and six of Beaumont

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1. Life of Betterton, Chas. Gildon, London, 1710. p., 174-175.

2. Geneste, I:384.

and Fletcher's plays.¹ Hart, and his lieutenant, Mohun, who acted both before and after the Restoration, portrayed characters taken from Beaumont and Fletcher. These men acted in female parts before the wars, but it is very probable that they were too old for that when the return of Charles II allowed them to take up their old profession. It is these two men, rather than Beaumont and Fletcher, who get Rymer's praise for making The Maid's Tragedy pleasant and successful.² No record is at hand, of the women characters of either, but Hart appeared later, in The Humorous Lieutenant, Rule a Wife and Have a Wife, The Maid's Tragedy, The Chances, Philaster, Island Princess, King and No King, Rollo,³ while Mohun played in The Humorous Lieutenant, The Maid's Tragedy, Island Princess, Wit Without Money, King and No King, and Rollo.⁴ Geneste's record of Hart's characters includes ~~one~~ each from Jonson^X and Shakespere, while he gives Mohun credit for two from each of those playwrights.⁵ In 1695 Settle wrote a prologue for a presentation of Philaster. He took occasion in it to praise both the play itself, and two of the players mentioned above (Hart and Nell Gwyn, whom he calls by her popular name, "Nell"):

" That good old play Philaster ne'er can fail
But we young actors how shall we prevail?
Philaster and Bellario, let me tell ye,
For these bold parts we have no Hart, no Nelly,
Those darlings of the stage."⁶

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1. Geneste, I:379.

2. Spingarn, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, II:205.

3. Geneste, I:375.

4. Ibid., I:377.

5. Ibid., I:377.

6. Ibid., I:83.

Other actors of considerable standing, whom we find appearing in Beaumont and Fletcher plays, are Kynaston, Mrs. Cook, John Lacy, Clun, Burt and Mrs. Barry.

If we may take the word of the author of Historia Histrionica, in his Dialogue of Plays and Players, the actors with whom we have chosen to deal, were among the best of the century, with the early ones greatly superior to those that came later. The characters which he uses in the Dialogue, for his discourse upon the drama, are Lovewit, and Trueman. As Trueman says, the view which he gives of the decline of the drama, may be due to the weakness of an old man for the things of his youth, but, at the same time, we see no reason to change the following verdict, of plays and players of the seventeenth century:-

"True. Ben Jonson! How dare you name Ben Jonson in these times, when we have such a crowd of poets of a quite different genius, the least of which thinks himself as well able to correct Ben Jonson as he could a country school-mistress that taught to spell!"

"Love. We have, indeed, poets of a different genius, so are the plays; but in my opinion, they are all of 'em (some few excepted) as much inferior to those of former times, as the actors now in being (generally speaking) are, compared to Hart, Mohun, Burt, Lacy, Clun, and Shatterel; for I can reach no farther back."

"True. I can, and dare assure you, if my fancy and memory are not partial (for men of my age are apt to be over-indulgent to the thoughts of their youthful days), I say the actors that I have seen before the wars - Lowin, Taylor,

Pollard and some others - were almost as far beyond Hart and his company, as those were beyond these now in being."

"Love. I am willing to believe it, but cannot readily; because I have been told that those whom I mentioned were bred up under the others of your acquaintance, and followed their manner of action, which is now lost; so far that, when the question has been asked why these players do not revive the Silent Woman and some others of Jonson's plays (once of highest esteem), they have answered, "Truly, because there are none living who can rightly humour those parts; for all who related to the Blackfriars (where they were acted in perfection) are now dead and almost forgotten."¹

Part of this may sound like pessimism, but we quote it because it bears out the above mention of Restoration actors who either helped Beaumont and Fletcher plays maintain a high standing on the stage, or who depended upon the reputation of those plays for their own success. Either way, we have Beaumont and Fletcher holding at least an enviable position throughout the first hundred years following their introduction upon the English stage.

For from twelve to thirty-five actors to earn in forty years, lasting names largely through portraying on the stage, the joint works of two playwrights, seems improbable to us today. To have such names as Lowin, Benfield, Taylor, Underwood, Condell, Burbage and Field, has surely not been

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1. Historia Histrionica, London, 1699. supposedly by James Wright. Old English Plays (Dodsley's), W.C. Hazlitt, London, 1876. XV; 403-404.

repeated in any half-century since. The latter half of the century pushes this record hard, with such names as Betterton, Nell Gwyn, Mrs. Marshall, Hart, Mohun and Kynaston, but many of those were better known for their work in Restoration drama. Although there were then no long runs upon single plays, as there are now, thus allowing an actor more frequent change of part, and more frequent opportunity of starring, it is to be remembered that these actors were limited to from two to five stages in one comparatively small city. It is probable that no period of equal length has produced so many names standing for the same rank of Thespian art, regardless of limitation as to the number of authors, or stages, as those which may be assigned almost entirely to the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, in the early years of the seventeenth century.

C H A P T E R I I I

THE REPUTATION OF BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER AMONG THE POETS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

However hard, or easy, it may be to please people who are anxious to be entertained, it is another matter to please those who are competitors for the same prize. Yet this is exactly what Beaumont and Fletcher seem to have done. Striving with other dramatists for first place upon the London stage they seem always to have been on the best of terms with them all. The difference in the attitude taken by contemporary playwrights, and that taken by the theatre-goer, may, perhaps, be best shown by the fate of one of Fletcher's works, The Faithful Shepherdess. This pastoral play, when produced, was openly and flatly a failure. The audience was not pleased, and no attempt at another presentation was made for several years. But such poets and dramatists as Davies, Cartwright, Harris, and Ben Jonson hurried to the rescue, or at least the support, of what they considered to be true merit in poetry. Perhaps Jonson's verses are most worth reproducing here:

To the worthy Author Mr. John Fletcher,
upon his **Faithful** Shepherdess.

"The wise, and many-headed Bench, that sits
Upon the Life and Death of Plays, and Wits,
(Composed of Gamester, Captain, Knight, Knight's Man,
Lady, or Pucelle, that wears Mask or Fan,
Velvet, or Taffata Cap, rank'd in the dark

With the Shop's Foreman, or some such brave Spark,
That may judge for his Six-pence) had, before
They saw it half, damn'd thy whole Play; and, more,
Their motives were, since it had not to do
With Vices, which they look'd for, and came to.
I, that am glad, thy Innocence was thy Guilt,
And wish that all the Muses' Blood were spilt
In such a Martyrdom, to vex their eyes,
Do crown thy murder'd Poem: which shall rise
A glorified work to Time, when Fire,
Or Moths, shall eat what all these Fools admire."

The fact that Shakespeare¹, and Jonson², (to whom Beaumont and Fletcher are usually made to bow for first honors in dramatic literature) allowed Fletcher to assist them in writing plays, shows that these premier writers had, at least, a certain respect for his ability. That Shirley³, Middleton⁴, Massinger⁵, and Rowley⁶, (who are usually ranked high among the second rate dramatists of the time) joined with Fletcher in writing, suggests that they rather

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1. Fleay- Shakespeare Manual -- 1876. P., 93. Thorndike- Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakespeare. P., 35.
2. Langbaine- Dramatic Poets, P., 370. - Jacob, Poetical Register, Vol. 1:161. - Fleay, Shakespeare Manual, P., 93.
3. Fleay, Shakespeare Manual, P., 94. (Note: Shirley was the Editor of the 1647 edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's Works. He wrote a commendatory poem, which he printed with others prefixed to that edition).
4. Langbaine, Dramatic Poets, P., 370.-
5. Langbaine, Dramatic Poets, P., 217.- Jacob, Poetical Register, 1:177.
6. Fleay- Shakespeare Manual, P., 93-94.

admired him. Most of these men are more frequently mentioned in connection with Fletcher than with Beaumont. Jonson, however, seems to have had closer and more cordial relations with Beaumont. At any rate, we have no such verses as these from Jonson to Fletcher,-

"How I do love thee, Beaumont, and thy muse,
That unto me dost such Religion use!
How I do fear myself, that am not worth
The least indulgent thought thy Pen drops forth!
At once thou maks't me happy, and unmaks't;
And, giving largely to me, more thou tak'st,
What Fate is mine, that so itself bereaves?
What Art is thine, that so thy Friend deceives?
When even there, where most thou praisest me
For writing better, I must envy thee".

The note made under this poem by the editor, Mr. Seward, in the 1750 edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's Works indicates the true regard which the author seems to have had for Beaumont-- "This short Copy (which seems wrote with a sincerity not common in complimentary poems) treats Beaumont not only as an excellent Critic, but as an excellent Poet: . . .". Men of the later seventeenth century, indeed, seem to have thought more highly of Beaumont's judgment and critical ability, than they did of his other qualities. They seem, however, to have based this belief largely upon what they had read, or heard, of Jonson's own opinion of him. Dryden in his Essay of Dramatic Poesy, states thus, the public estimate, and Jonson's estimate, of Beaumont: --

"Beaumont and Fletcher had great natural gifts improved by study: Beaumont especially, being so accurate a judge of plays, that Ben Jonson, while he lived, submitted all his writings to his censure; and it is thought used his judgment in correcting, (if not in contriving) all his plots."

From this it will appear that from about 1600 until Beaumont's death (1616) Beaumont and Fletcher were, if not the most successful dramatists, at least bidding very strongly for that position. They were recognised, respected, and loved by other dramatists writing for the same stages, at the same time.

Further than that given in the first chapter of these pages, there seems to be no available material regarding our authors between the time of Beaumont's death and the publication of their works in 1647. It has been shown that they were very popular during all those years, but it remained for James Shirley and others to bring an expression of that popularity into print, by editing the first folio collection of their plays. These expressions of appreciation by playwrights and poets, which will be enlarged upon later, ^{were} was prefixed to that volume in 1647, and ^{more} was included in the first volume of the 1750 edition of their works.

These poets have given Beaumont and Fletcher a greater share of praise, put into definite words, than comes to them from any other source. While poetry, in some ways, is likely to be less sincere and more conventional than prose, because of the limitations of metre, mechanical rules, and inversions of thought to fit the metre, the poets of the

seventeenth century succeeded, perhaps, in paying poetical compliments, better than have those of any other century. Commendatory poems are likely, above all other poetry, to seem stilted and formal. Written to one who is living, to one who may say something considerate in return, there is a certain element of hesitation, of forced compliment. Written to one who is dead, they possess a certain element of dutiful praise, because of the feeling that it is not right to deal too harshly with one who is unable to protect or defend himself. Some of the poems upon which the rest of this chapter is based, were written under circumstances tending more to conventionalism than either the fact that the recipient was living, or that he was dead. For instance, the poem of Jonson's beginning, How I do Love thee, Beaumont, and thy Muse, was written in reply to one by Beaumont in which he had praised Jonson. In complimenting Beaumont and his Muse, Jonson must have felt bound to the task no less by a sense of obligation than by that of pleasure. The poets of the seventeenth century were very adept, however, in avoiding such tendencies to formalism, and there is much in this mass of material which seems the simple expression of true regard.

As has been said, the publication of Beaumont and Fletcher's works in 1647 brought forth a great mass¹ of

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1. "The commendatory verses prefixed to the Beaumont and Fletcher folio of 1647 show that they were probably the most popular of the Elizabethan period - - - certainly not Shakespeare - - - received such a volume of praise" - A.H. Thorndike - Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakespeare P. 10.

poetry dealing with the authors in all possible attitudes, and from almost numberless points of view. In the 1750 edition these eleven hundred lines of verse are reprinted, filling nearly sixty pages. The authors, numbering twenty-one, make an impressive roll. They may be rather conveniently divided into three groups of, dramatists and poets, divines, and public men. This is a very summary division, for some of the men belong in more than the one group in which they are found. Leading the dramatists we find Ben Jonson, and James Shirley, names signifying dramatic excellence to every student of seventeenth century drama. There are several others who could well be named here, but who for convenience are listed with the other poets. The best known names among these latter are Edmund Waller, Richard Lovelace, and John Denham, all poets of high standing in the seventeenth century. Following these are Robert Stapylton, known as poet and dramatist, William Cartwright, a member of the 'Tribe of Ben' who was called one of the best poets, orators, philosophers, and preachers of his time, Richard Brome, a servant of Ben Jonson, and commended by him, Alexander Brome, a Royalist attorney and poet, Thomas Stanley, 'a poet of some eminence', and Aston Cokaine, a distinguished poet who was created a Baronet by Charles the Second. The divines number five men: John Earle, Bishop of Salisbury, a Royalist scholar and poet, Richard Corbet, Bishop of Oxford, John Berkinhead, a Royalist, Amanuensis to Bishop Laud, Fellow of All-Souls, and poet, Jaspar Maine, a Royalist preacher and poet, and John Harris, a Greek Professor, preacher and poet. The men of various positions of public distinction, are the schoolmaster John

Webb, George Lisle, one of the King's Judges, Henry Moody, who was given an honorary degree by Charles the Second, and the learned Roger L'Estrange, better known as a Royalist pamphleteer, and as a translator. This catalogue of names indicated plainly that the verses under which they appear, represent the highest and best literary authority of the century.

A few selections from the opinions of these men, regarding Beaumont and Fletcher, follow. Roger L'Estrange, prince of controversial pamphleteers, found time to appreciate things not political. He draws a striking figure, when he writes of Fletcher:

" Have you not seen the Sun's almighty Ray
Rescue th' affrighted World, and redeem Day
From black Despair? how his victorious Beam
Scatters the Storm, and drowns the petty Flame
Of Lightning, in the Glory of his Eye:
How full of Pow'r, how full of Majesty?
When, to us Mortals, nothing else was known,
But the sad Doubt, whether to burn, or drown.

Choler, and Phlegme, Heat, and dull Ignorance,
Have cast the People into such a Trance,
That Fears and Danger seem Great equally,
And no Dispute left now, but how to die.
Just in this nick, Fletcher sets the World clear
Of all Disorder, and reforms us here"¹.

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1. Roger L'Estrange - Works of Beaumont and Fletcher-- London edition 1750, Vol I:53.

There is little use in attempting to draw any distinction between the praises of Beaumont and of Fletcher. When one poet says that Fletcher cannot be mentioned without an accompanying hyperbole, another says of Beaumont, 'thou strik'st our Sense so deep, At once thou mak'st us blush, rejoyce, and weep."¹ When one poet grants Fletcher the ability to subdue a Melancholy like Burton's, another says that Beaumont's Wit was so great that it killed him early in life. One poet makes them "bear between them all the World of Fancy clear", while still another places them on such equal footing that it is impossible to tell whether it is John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, or John Beaumont and Francis Fletcher.

If these fancies seem extravagant, others, less so, ringing more truly from the heart, are not hard to find. Each alone, and both together, are quietly affirmed to be first of their times. Some of these follow: --

" And, By the Court of Muses be't Decreed,
What Graces spring from Poesy's richer Seed,
When we name Fletcher, shall be proclaim'd,
As all, that's Royal, is when Caesar's nam'd".²

" Beaumont lies here; and where now shall we have
A Muse like his to sigh upon his grave?
Ah! none to weep this with a worthy Tear,
But he, that cannot, Beaumont that lies here.

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1. George Lisle - 1750 Ed., Works of Beaumont and Fletcher P., 33.

2. Robert Stapylton, Ibid., 33.

.
Beaumont dies young, so Sidney did before;
There was not Poetry he could live to more;
He could not grow up higher; I scarce know
If th' Art itself unto that pitch could grow,
Were't not in thee, that hadst arrived the Height
Of all that Wit could reach, or Nature might.

.
Those few sententious Fragments shew more worth,
Than all the Poets Athens e'er brought forth;
And I am sorry we have lost those hours
On them, whose quickness comes far short of ours,
And dwell not more on thee, whose every Page
May be a Pattern for their Scene and Stage.

.
When thou'rt of Chaucer's Standing in the Tomb,
Thou shalt not share, but take up all, his room."¹

Richard Brome, a "servant" of Ben Jonson, probably
expressing ideas gathered from his master, says of Fletcher,

" I knew him, till he died;
And, at his Dissolution, what a Tide
Of Sorrow overwhelm'd the Stage."²

Thomas Stanley, known for his lyrics as well as for
his classical and philosophical contributions wrote the
following, upon the publication of their works,

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1. John Earle, Ibid., P., 9.
2. Richard Brome, Ibid., P., 59.

" Fletcher (whose Fame no Age can ever waste;
Envy of ours, and Glory of the last)
Is now alive again."¹

Of Fletcher, Brome said, in another place,
" You that have known him, know
The common Talk, that from his Lips did flow,
And run at waste, did favour more of Wit,
Than any of his Time, or since, have writ
(But few excepted) in the Stage's way:
His Scenes were Acts, and every Act a Play."²

Even though we question whether Beaumont reached the supreme height of poetry, whether he excelled all Greek poets, or whether he should justly hold the place long made sacred to Chaucer, we cannot doubt the attitude of seventeenth century poets. Regarding the ranking of Beaumont and Fletcher with other dramatists they are even more definite. Of Fletcher's comedy, one poet says,

" Shakespere to thee was dull, whose best Jest lies
I' th' Ladies questions, and the Fool's Replies."³

The individuality of Fletcher's poetry is made evident by Mr. Cartwright, well-known poet and preacher, when he says,

" 'Twixt Jonson's grave, and Shakespere's lighter Sound,

* * * * *

1. Thomas Stanley, Ibid., P., 54.
2. Richard Brome, Ibid., P., 58.
3. Wm. Cartwright, Ibid., P., 28.

His Muse so steer'd, that something still was found,
Nor this, nor that, nor both, but so his own,
That 'twas his Mark, and he was by it known."¹

Cartwright showed no hesitation in making Jonson bow to Fletcher, in some forms of dramatic ability;

" Jonson hath writ things lasting, and Divine,
Yet his Love-Scenes, Fletcher, compar'd to thine,
Are cold and frosty; and express Love so,
As Heat with Ice, or warm Fires mix'd with Snow."²

Shakespeare too was marked as being less consistent in his best work than Fletcher was. It is generally recognised today that if all the work usually assigned to Shakespeare is really his, he was, as one writer has said, sometimes 'on the heights', and sometimes 'in the depths'. This inequality in his work was recognised in the seventeenth century, and used against him in Fletcher's praise:

" Brave Shakespeare flow'd, yet had his Ebbings too,
Often above himself, sometimes below;
Thou always best; if aught seem'd to decline,
'Twas the unjudging Rout's mistake, not thine."³

It will be remembered that in the first poem quoted in this chapter, Jonson makes mention of the purity of Fletcher's motives, and of his 'Innocence' in The Faithful Shepherd-

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1. Wm. Cartwright, Ibid., P., 25-26.

2. Wm. Cartwright, Ibid., P., 27.

3. J. Berkinhead, Ibid., P., 18. (The reference to the 'seeming decline', and the 'Rout's mistake' is to the Faithful Shepherdess mentioned above).

ess. Beaumont and Fletcher make boast of their chastity of thought and language in the prologues to The Knight of the Burning Pestle, the Coronation, and The Woman Hater, and throughout the century others regarded them as the most chaste and moral dramatists who ever wrote good plays. Besides Jonson, the poets testifying to this, are Berkinhead, Maine, Cartwright, Stapylton, Lovelace and John Harris. Berkinhead recalls the fact that Fletcher was the son of a minister, and uses that in connection with the purity of his language;

" And as thy thoughts were clear, so, Innocent;
Thy Fancy gave no unswept Language vent;
Slander'st not Laws, prophan'st no holy Page,
(As if thy Father's Crosier aw'd the Stage;)
High Crimes were still arraign'd:" ¹

In speaking of their work as a whole, Jasper Maine, 'a quaint preacher, and noted poet', pays them a still higher tribute;

" Vices which were
Manners abroad, did grow corrected there:
They who possess a Box, and half Crown spent
To learn Obsceneness, returned innocent,
And thank'd you for this Coz'nage, whose chaste Scene

* * * * *

1. J. Berkinhead, Ibid., P., 19.

Taught Loves so noble, so reform'd, so clean,
That they, who brought foul fires, and thither came
To bargain, went thence with a holy flame."¹

Robert Stapylton, a dramatist and translator, pays
Fletcher much the same sort of honor;

" But his main End does drooping Virtue raise,
And crowns her Beauty with eternal Bays;
In scenes where she inflames the frozen Soul,
While Vice (her Paint wash'd off) appears so foul;
She must this blessed Isle and Europe leave,
And some new Quadrant of the Globe deceive;
Or hide her Blushes on the Afric Shore,
Like Marius, but ne'er rise to triumph more."²

William Cartwright, a "son" of Ben Jonson, probably
influenced by him, in writing of Shakespere's, and of Fletcher's
comedy, went one step farther, and compared the chastity of
the two. Shakespere surely could not be proud of the
comparison;

" Whose Wit (Shakespere's) our nice times would Obscen²⁴esses
And which made Bawdry pass for Comical. (call,
Nature was all his Art; thy vein was free
As his, but without his Scurrility;
From whom Mirth came forth unforc'd, no Jest perplexed,
But without labour clear, chast, and unvex'd."³

* * * * *

1. Jasper Maine, Ibid., P., 21.
2. Robert Stapylton, Ibid., P., 32.
3. Wm. Cartwright, Ibid., P., 29.

Such verses would indicate to one not acquainted with the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, that they were of the highest type of purity in thought, language, and plot. By the readers of today they are not considered so. We claim to dislike such problems as the direct and open trial of woman's chastity, and we object to a play turning upon the question of a woman's honor, in plays which we read in the library but which are not on the stage, while we tolerate and even support modern plays which have as much or more immorality, and which certainly have less groundwork of truth, beauty, and dramatic art. The titles of such plays as A Chaste Maid in Cheapside, The Maid's Tragedy, The Second Maiden's Tragedy, indicate the openness with which such questions of morality were incorporated into the drama. In a less open way, perhaps, but no less directly, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Edward the Third, Virginia, Lucrece, and Valentinian deal with the same problem.¹ For a great many years this theme was a very popular one. The poets who praised Beaumont and Fletcher could not have been ignorant of this, nor could they have been ignorant of the contents of the plays of which they wrote: too many of them were dramatists, and Beaumont and Fletcher's plays were too well known, for that. But dramatists and poets were not the only ones to praise Beaumont and Fletcher for the purity of their work. Among the writers of commendatory verses were five preachers, two of whom were bishops. Of these five, four specifically commend these playwrights for their chastity. We may not assume that these poets and divines perjured their

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1. Schelling, F.E., Elizabethan Drama - Boston - New York - 1908 1:5

consciences, but we must conclude rather that the taste and the ideals of the age were such as to sanction what we should call 'indecent' plays. Although those things which displease us were very prevalent in that age, they were only superficial, they were not the essential characteristics of the age. Neither are the immoral scenes in the drama of the day the essential characteristics of the drama. Mr. Hazlitt has said that our literature " is Gothic and grotesque; unequal and irregular; not cast in a previous mold, nor of one uniform texture, but of great weight in the whole, and of incomparable value in the best parts." One is almost led to believe that he was thinking of Beaumont and Fletcher when he wrote that. If Beaumont and Fletcher wrote some very immoral scenes, they also wrote some very moral ones; if they drew some very bad women, they also drew some very good ones to contrast with them. As a whole the morals of the people were sound; and Beaumont and Fletcher merely reflected society as they saw it, both the sound and the unsound elements. Richard Lovelace, a popular lyricist of his time gives the typical seventeenth century, the Beaumont and Fletcher, point of view when he writes of The Custom of the Country:

" Hear, ye foul Speakers, that pronounce the Air
Of Stews and Sewers, I will inform you where,
And how, to cloath aright your wanton Wit;
Without her nasty Bawd attending it.
View here a loose Thought said with such a Grace,
Minerva might have spoke in Venus' Face;
So well disguis'd, that 'twas conceived by none,

But Cupid had Diana's Linnen on."¹

But it is not to be thought that Beaumont and Fletcher received undisputed, and unvarying, praise throughout the seventeenth century. After the Restoration, when satire held such an important place in the literature of the day, they came in for a certain amount of dispraise. Although most of this is hypocritical, and therefore of little intrinsic worth, it demands some mention here because the record would be incomplete without it. Even to one who has but a slight acquaintance with post-Restoration literature, the name of John Oldham, or such titles as The Corruption of the Times by Money, and The Great Assizes Holden in Parnassus by Apollo, suggest the character of treatment which the stage, or Beaumont and Fletcher received.

The spirit of such literature as that just suggested began before the Restoration. While it did not reach its height until much later, the tone may be detected in material growing out of the Puritan movement which closed the theatres in 1642. In that bit of poetry just named, The Great Assizes, published in 1645,² a character about to be tried by a jury made up of dramatic poets, is made to criticise them harshly. It is thus that he characterises them;

" These mercenary pen-men of the stage,
That foster the grand vices of the age,
Should in this Common-wealth no office beare,

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1. Richard Lovelace - 1750 Ed. of Works of Beaumont and Fletcher, P., 39.

2. The British Bibliographer, - Sir Egerton Brydges - 3v. - London - 1810. 1:527.

But rather stand with us delinquents here:
Shakespeare's a mimicke, Massinger a sot,
Heywood for Aganippe takes a plot:
Beaumont and Fletcher make one poet, they
Single dare not adventure on a play.
These things are all but the errours of the Muses,
Abortive witts, foul fountains of abuses:
Reptiles, which are equivocally bred,
Under some hedge, not in that geniall bed
Where lovely art with a brave wit conjoyn'd,
Engenders poets of the noblest kind."

Such general attacks upon dramatic work brand themselves at once, to our minds, as of no great value, and therefore in need of little or no comment. However, not all the satire of these years was hostile to Beaumont and Fletcher. In some poetry published just a year later,¹ called The Times Displayed in Six Sestyads, the sixth sestyad is headed,

" Apollo grieves to see the Times

So pester'd with Mechanics lavish rimes."

While Appollo grieves because of much of the dramatic work which is presented to him, he does not grieve over that of Beaumont and Fletcher. They, with Davenant, Shirley, Massinger, and a few others, are made to become a model upon which later ones are to pattern their work.

As the spirit of Puritanism was replaced by the

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1. Ibid., P., 534-535.

Restoration spirit, the satires came, almost universally to have a tone of partiality. This is so well exemplified in John Oldham's ode on the works of Ben Jonson, that although it does not specifically mention Beaumont and Fletcher, it seems worthy of rather extended space here. It follows:

" Hail mighty Founder of our Stage! for so I dare
Entitle thee, nor any modern censures fear,
Nor care what thy unjust Detractors say:
They'll say perhaps, that others did Materials bring,
That others did the first Foundation lay,
And glorious 'twas (we grant) but to begin,
But thou alone could'st finish the design,
All the fair Model, and the Workmanship was thine:
Some bold advent'urers might have been before,
Who durst the unknown world explore,
By these it was survey'd at distant view,
And here and there a Cape, and Line they drew,
Which only serv'd as hints, and marks to thee,
Who wast reserv'd to make the full discovery: . . .".¹

I have said that Oldham is partial in this. While that is true, it is just as true, that he represents the belief held by some, at various times during the century, that Jonson was the founder of the English stage, and that even Shakespere could not contend with him for that honor. To these, Beaumont and Fletcher then, would have been thought unworthy of mention in the same breath with "Immortal Ben".

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1. John Oldham - Works - London - 1686. P., 69.

As will be seen later, the stage fell into rather great disrepute in the later years of the century. An expression of this is found in a satire called The Corruption of the Times by Money, written by Robert Gould, and published in pamphlet form, in 1693. Much of the corruption of the times is blamed to the stage:

" But Pander, Player, Pimp, and Bawd will thrive
As long as Farce, or Threatre survive,
For Lust and Vanity o'erflow the Age,
And still ebb back to their own Spring, the Stage."

Another author who is a satirist, although he is more than that, is the Duke of Buckingham (Earl of Mulgrave). In his satire he mingles much just criticism, but because it contains some satire, his work is placed here. He is the very opposite of hostile to Beaumont and Fletcher. In the midst of a satire upon contemporary (1682) soliloquies, he says;¹

" First then, Soliloquies had need be few,
Extreamly short, and spoke in passion too.
Our Lovers talking to themselves, for want
Of others, make the Pit their Confidant:
Nor is the matter mended much, if thus
They trust a friend only to tell it us.
Th' occasion should as naturally fall,
As when Bellarion confesses all."

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1. An Essay upon Poetry - Earl of Mulgrave - Spingarn -
Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century - 2:291.

This high praise I take to mean Beaumont and Fletcher's Bellarion in Philaster, or Love Lies A-Bleeding, who concealed her sex and paraded as a boy until near the close of the fifth act.

Then Buckingham goes on, more in the way of advice to one who would learn to write good drama, than in satire. Shakespere and Fletcher are held up as the men whom he is to follow most closely:²

" Yet to ourselves we Justice must allow,
Shakespere and Fletcher are the wonders now;
Consider them, and read them o're and o're,
Go see them play'd, then read them as before.
For though in many things they grosly fail,
Over our Passions still they so prevail,
That our own grief by theirs is rockt asleep.
The dull are forc'd to feel, the wise to weep.
Their Beauties Imitate, avoid their faults:
First on a Plot employ thy carefull thoughts,
Turn it with time a thousand several waies,
This oft alone has given success to plays."

Some mention has already been made of the number of Beaumont and Fletcher plays that were revived in the seventeenth century. The names of the men who did this work, throw a considerable light upon the literary reputation of

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1. Ibid., P., 292.

our authors. The fact that Dryden,¹ Buckingham,² Rochester,³ D'Avenant,⁴ Waller,⁵ Tate,⁶ and Duffey,⁷ each revived a Beaumont and Fletcher play, adds very materially to the record of the esteem in which they were held by literary men throughout the century. That some of these men also revived some of Shakespere's plays, rather adds to, than detracts from the standing of these lesser dramatists.

It seems evident that Beaumont and Fletcher held first place among literary men of the seventeenth century. The men of their own times thought them worthy and able poet-dramatists, while the later poets, who saw the decline of the Drama, and the close of the Theatres, plainly ranked them ahead of Jonson and Shakespere. To have, prefixed to an edition of dramatic poems over eleven hundred lines of commendatory verse, by twenty-one poets, is a thing certainly unratched in the seventeenth century, and probably unequalled in the history of literature. To have plays revived by the best known dramatists, and wits of the century, is only further evidence of the universality of the appeal which Beaumont and Fletcher certainly made with their plays for a hundred years.

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1. Revived Prophetess - Langbaine, Dramatic Poets, P.,
2. Revived The Chances and Philaster - Preface to 1711 edition
Works of B & F 1750 edition, Vol. 1:4 (Preface)
3. Revived Valentinian - Langbaine, Dramatic Poets, P., 215.
4. Revived Woman Hater - Do. 211.
5. Revived Maid's Tragedy - Do. 212.
6. Revived Island Princess - Do. 210.
7. Revived Noble Gentleman - Do. 213.

CHAPTER IV

THE REPUTATION OF BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER AMONG THE CRITICS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

INTRODUCTION

We shall find little dramatic criticism in the first half of the seventeenth century. Several reasons may be assigned for this. In the first place dramatic criticism was new in England. It did not exist, as such, until Sir Philip Sidney wrote An Apology for Poetry, in 1583. If English dramatic criticism was born at this time, it was not especially precocious in its babyhood, for it did little of note for several years. In the second place, the so-called Elizabethan period, the great creative period, of English literature extended through the first quarter of the seventeenth century. The creative, generative spirit has, throughout all literary history, interfered with the critical spirit. The two seldom go hand in hand. Instead, they usually represent the time-worn figure of the pendulum swing from one extreme to the other. Moreover, criticism must have something to base its work upon, and time in which to develop. It had neither of these before 1625, for the English drama was but being developed at this time. There was, indeed, one man who showed a truly 'critical spirit' between Sidney's time and 1625, but Jonson was a contemporary of Beaumont and Fletcher, and knew them both as very close friends. Whether or not the fact that he loved these dramatists influenced

his remarks about them in a personal way, the further fact that they were contemporaries certainly did affect his estimate of their literary worth. One's perspective is never reliable regarding one's close friends; and perhaps Jonson realized this, for he says almost nothing in definite criticism of the kind or quality of their work.

While dramatic criticism was necessarily of minor importance because of its youth, and because of the immense amount of creative dramatic literature during the early years of the seventeenth century, there is still another reason to be assigned for its slow development before the Restoration. It may be summed up, perhaps in the word puritanism. It was the Puritan spirit which caused all the anti-stage controversy after 1625, and which spread into politics and resulted in the establishment of the Commonwealth. Or, perhaps, it would be more true to say that the Puritan spirit began in politics or in religion, and spread out into an opposition which finally closed the theatres in 1642.

The decade preceding this event did not produce much real criticism. It was a time of strife, of continual agitation, such as sometimes develops the highest and best powers of the contending parties. In this case it seems to have brought out on the one side only overzealous extremists who attacked the stage fiercely and blindly, and on the other, men who mercilessly punished such attacks by the use of the pillory and the stocks. William Prynne is the most representative of the first class, for he wrote the most famous attack upon the stage (his *Histrio-Mastix*), and suffered at the hands of its partisans;

his punishment being the loss of both ears, and the disgrace of having his books publicly burned under the pillory in which he stood. The character of the criticism of the period may be illustrated by some of the untrue and impossible things which Prynne tried to establish against the stage. His first argument (Act I, Scene I) is that stage plays are unlawful for Christians because they were originated and invented by the Devil himself. His second argument (Act I, Scene II) based upon his first, is that since stage plays were invented and practised by infidels and pagans, therefore they have been, are and must be evil and sinful. Before he has written a hundred pages (p., 93) he gives vent to a sentiment which we should call unchristian; - "O therefore let Stage-Players perish, yea, forever perish, which thus revive the cursed memory of Pagan Idols, and their infernall wickedness, whose remembrance should be for ever forgotten lest we perish by them;" And so he goes on through over a thousand pages of invective, calling loudly for the abolition of every vestige of drama. Although Prynne was severely punished for this, yet it must be admitted that he represented a tendency which was soon in control, for it was but nine years after the publication of this book that the theatres were closed. Although Prynne does not definitely attack Beaumont and Fletcher, his attitude is significant when one remembers the high esteem in which they were held, generally, at this time.¹

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1. Page 8. Court presentations about this time.

After the Restoration we find various trends of thought and criticism, represented by four men: - - Dryden, Rymer, Milton, Collier. Of these Dryden is probably the most potent and representative influence, and will be considered rather more in detail than the others. Rymer is taken as the leader of a school resting upon a close adherence to the letter of the classic Rules, applied by what he calls 'common sense'. In Collier there is much of the effervescent element, much that is radical and even unjust, but he is placed here as being representative of the popular spirit in the last few years of the century.

JOHN DRYDEN

It is as a dramatic critic that Dryden is most important to us, but he is so representative of the Restoration spirit as a man, and as a dramatist, that we shall consider him under the heads of man, dramatist, and dramatic critic.

Dryden has been called a time-server, and probably in some senses there is no more applicable term for him. The honesty of his motives is an old question. He has been severely criticised for pandering to public taste in his comedies, for fawning upon his patrons, or upon anyone who could probably benefit him, and for changing his religious faith without showing any reason other than policy. If he did all these things, in doing them he but betrayed his close relation with the Restoration spirit.

Dryden, the dramatist, is almost a counterpart of Dryden the man. The Restoration spirit which favored the French drama plus a liberal sprinkling of immorality was led

by Charles the Second. Those who had followed him into exile had also reached the conclusion that the French was a better drama than any that England had produced. Dryden voices this feeling in his Essay of Dramatic Poesy, when he makes Lisideius say that forty years before (written 1668) the English drama was superior to the French, but that since then the tables had so turned that now the French was far better.

As success came, and with success such attacks as were made upon him in The Rehearsal, Dryden placed more and more immorality and bawdry in his plays, because he knew that would catch the popular taste. From open statements regarding his work, and purpose in that work, he descended to the mean stage of defending his own inexcusable license by quoting other dramatists. In doing this he chose, of course, only the parts which would bear him out in what he wished to say just at that moment. A good example of this is found in his Preface to The Mock Astrologer, - "It is charged upon me, that I make debauched persons (such as they say my Astrologer and Gamester are) my protagonists, or the chief persons of the drama, and that I make them happy in the conclusion of my play; against the law of comedy, which is to reward virtue, and punish vice. I answer first, that I know no such law to have been constantly observed in comedy, either by the ancient or modern poets . . . Ben Jonson himself, after whom I may be proud to err, has given me more than once the example of it As for Beaumont and Fletcher, I need not alledge examples out of them; for that were to quote almost all their comedies."

"But now it will be objected, that I patronize vice by the authority of former poets, and extenuate my own faults

by recrimination. I answer, that as I defend myself by their example, so that example I defend by reason, and by the end of all dramattick poesy." The end of dramatic poesy, especially of comedy, he says in the same essay, is to make the hearer laugh by means of faults and vices which "may be forgiven, not such as must of necessity be punished." "But", he goes on, "lest any man should think that I write this to make libertinism amiable, or that I cared not(i.e. scrupled not) to debase the end and institution of comedy, so I might thereby maintain my own errors, and those of better poets, I must further declare, both for them and for myself, that we make not vicious persons happy, but only as heaven makes sinners so,- that is, by reclaiming them from vice; for so it is to be supposed they are, when they resolve to marry; for then enjoying what they desire in one, they cease to pursue the love of many."¹

It is not the purpose here to justify those dramatists upon whom Dryden rested for authority in his failure to punish sin. He saw that his argument was open to attack, and so tried to ward off that blow by making his characters undergo a conversion from sin to purity which might seem as artificial as his own change of religious faith seemed to his enemies. But Dryden as a dramatist has already filled more space than was at first intended for him. The purpose of it all has been to show that in the heat of controversy, Dryden forgot or omitted mention of, broad and fundamental principles. His desire to justify himself in details of dramatic commission or omission, made him sometime support statements which Dryden the true critic would

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1. Prose works of John Dryden - Edmond Malone - London - 1800. II:198-201.

have rejected. A great many of his Prefaces were written under these conditions, and so in these we must not expect Dryden to reveal his best self.

But when Dryden chose he could be a good critic. There has been no question of his learning, or of his ability; the only question has been his application of those qualities. When he attempted to make an Opera of Milton's Paradise Lost, he said this of Criticism; "In the first place, I must take leave to tell them, that they wholly mistake the nature of criticism who think its business is principally to find fault. Criticism, as it was first instituted by Aristotle, was meant a standard of judging well; the chiefest part of which is, to observe those excellencies which should delight a reasonable reader . . . 'Tis malicious and unmannerly to snarl at the little lapses of a pen, from which Virgil himself stands not exempted."¹ It is in such work as he outlines here that we find the true, the best Dryden.

Most of Dryden's criticism of Beaumont and Fletcher is of this sort. In the passages where he considered their work there enters little of Dryden the Dramatist, but much of Dryden the Critic. There are few things in them which he finds worthy of censure, and those are mainly lesser faults, certainly those which may be forgiven or explained away. In The Scornful Lady Dryden thinks the motive for the conversion of a man's humour is rather weak. His only censure is that the lesson taught there would be expected in a sermon, but not in a play.

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1. An Essay on the Dramatic Poesy of the Last Age - Ker, I:165-6

He passes it thus lightly, saying that it is not an essential of the play. Shakespere and Fletcher are criticised about equally for lame, ridiculous, and incorrect plotting, and for not observing the decorum of the stage. But the things which he dislikes are "absurdities which may more properly be called the age's fault than theirs."¹ Another fault with which Dryden charges Shakespere and Fletcher about equally is the inequality of their work. He says that Shakespere is sometimes the first of poets of all languages, and sometimes below the poorest of all ages. "Neither is the luxuriance of Fletcher," says Dryden, "(which his friends have taxed in him) a less fault than the carelessness of Shakespere. He does not well always; and, when he does, he is a true Englishman; he knows not when to give over. If he wakes in one scene, he commonly slumbers in another; and if he pleases you in the first three acts, he is frequently so tired with his labour, that he goes heavily in the fourth, and sinks under the burden in the fifth."² For present purposes it is interesting to note that Dryden, in the attempt to prove Restoration wit better and more refined than that of Shakespere, Fletcher and Jonson, finds that "Fletcher's Don John is our only bugbear."³

It is in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy that Dryden is most free from selfish influences, and consequently the opinion there expressed regarding Beaumont and Fletcher is most likely

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1. An Essay on the Dramatic Poesy of the Last Age - Ker, I:165-6.
2. Ibid., I:172.
3. Ibid., I:174.

to be the true estimation in which he held them. It follows, almost entire:- "Beaumont and Fletcher, of whom I am next to speak, had, with the advantages of Shakespere's wit, which was their precedent, great natural gifts, improved by study: Beaumont especially being so accurate a judge of plays, that Ben Jonson, while he lived, submitted all his writings to his censure, and, 'tis thought, used his judgement in correcting, if not contriving, all his plots Their plots were generally more regular than Shakespere's, especially those which were made before Beaumont's death; and they understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better; whose wild debaucheries, and quickness of wit in repartees, no poet can ever paint as they have done. Humour, which Ben Jonson derived from particular persons, they made it not their business to describe: they represented all the passions very lively, but above all, love. I am apt to believe the English language in them arrived to its highest perfection: what words have since been taken in, are rather superfluous than ornamental (necessary). Their plays are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage; two of theirs being acted through the year for one of Shakespere's or Johnson's: the reason is, because there is a certain gaiety in their comedies, and pathos in their more serious plays, which suits generally with all men's humours. Shakespere's language is likewise a little obsolete, and Ben Jonson's wit comes short of theirs."¹

Those are Dryden's generalisations; let him develop those ideas more specifically. Although throughout this Essay

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1. An Essay of Dramatic Poesy - Ker, I:80-81.

Dryden speaks only of Shakespere, Fletcher and Jonson as representative of the English drama, it seems but just to include Beaumont with Fletcher, for we have already quoted him as saying that the plots worked out together are better than those of Fletcher alone. Further than this, of the plays for which Dryden especially commends Fletcher (The Scornful Lady, The Maid's Tragedy, A King and No King, and Rollo), all but Rollo are now considered as due to the joint authorship of Beaumont and Fletcher. Consequently, it seems but fair to apply what Dryden says of Fletcher, to Beaumont as well, whether he meant it so or not.

"I could produce," says Dryden, "even in Shakespeare's and Fletcher's works, some plays which are almost exactly formed; as The Merry Wives of Windsor, and The Scornful Lady; but because (generally speaking) Shakespeare, who writ first, did not perfectly observe the laws of Comedy, and Fletcher, who came nearer to perfection, yet through carelessness made many faults; I will take the pattern of a perfect play from Ben Johnson;"¹ For a 'perfect' play, Dryden, as we see, goes to Johnson. But Fletcher gets praise almost as high. Dryden thought very highly of the French drama, and commended it. For an English play showing "that uniformity and unity of design which I have commended in the French,"² he chose Rollo, a play by Beaumont and Fletcher, where "indeed the plot is neither large nor intricate, but just enough to fill the minds of the audience, not to cloy them."² Although the time does not

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1. An Essay of Dramatic Poesy - Ker, I:79.

The favor which Jonson found in Dryden's eyes was largely due to the influence of St. Evremond. Dryden learned his Classical standards from the same man.

2. Ibid., I:80.

exactly agree with the Classical theory, and although there is some farce, Dryden sets these disadvantages off by showing that Ben Johnson's Sejanus, and Catiline are "Unnatural mixtures of comedy and tragedy," plainly below the standard set by Rollo. For general beauty and success of plot, Dryden names one of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, and two of Jonson's; - The Maid's Tragedy, The Alchemist, and The Silent Woman. Their plots are characterised thus;- "'Tis evident that the more the persons are, the greater will be the variety of plot. If then the parts are managed so regularly, that the beauty of the whole be kept entire, and that the variety become not a confused mass of accidents, you will find it infinitely pleasing to be led in a labyrinth of design, where you see some of your way before you, yet discern not the end until you arrive at it."¹ But Dryden found two more things well done in the plot of Beaumont and Fletcher - They knew what to omit, and they knew how to work out the end in the most pleasing manner. As to omissions, and the use of devices for simplifying the action, "those actions which by reason of their cruelty will cause aversion in us, or by reason of their impossibility, unbelief, ought either wholly to be avoided by a poet, or only delivered by narration." After commending Jonson for both of these things, Dryden returns to Fletcher. "In that excellent play, A King and No King," he says, "Fletcher goes yet farther; for the whole unravelling of the plot is done by narration in the fifth act, after the manner of the ancients."²

In the discussion of Beaumont and Fletcher already

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1. Essay of Dramatic Poesy - Ker, I:73.

2. Ibid., I:65.

quoted from Dryden (p.,54), it will be remembered that he characterized their plots as better than Shakespeare's, the conversation of their gentlemen, and their use of the English language above all poets, their wit better than Jonson's, and their portrayal of love as especially happy. When Dryden, several years later made some changes in Troilus and Cressida, he prefixed an essay in which occurs a more complete discussion of Shakespeare and Fletcher. He concluded here that while they both failed properly to observe the unities, Shakespeare failed most noticeably; that in characterization, Jonson is very definite, Shakespeare generally good, Fletcher inferior to both, in that often his characters are "but pictures shown you in the twilight; that Shakespeare had the more manly passions, Fletcher the softer."¹ Drawing definite conclusions from this difference in the portrayal of the passions, Dryden decides that "Shakespeare writ better betwixt man and man; Fletcher betwixt man and woman: consequently, the one described friendship better; the other, love: yet Shakespeare taught Fletcher to write love: and Juliet and Desdemona are originals To conclude all, he was a limb of Shakespeare." Although Dryden, most representative of seventeenth century criticism, made Fletcher a limb of Shakespeare, he made him such a limb that English dramatic literature would hobble instead of walk if that limb were taken away.

One more specimen of Dryden's opinion of seventeenth century drama seems necessary before we pass to Rymer and his school. Dryden plainly felt that in some respects the

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1. Preface to Troilus and Cressida - 1679 - Ker, I:202-229.

Restoration drama was better than anything preceding it, but of Shakespere and Fletcher he says, "We want their beauties to countervail our faults."¹ His admiration for Shakespere, Fletcher and Jonson was very high. He does not hesitate to say that only they were "capable of bringing us to that degree of perfection which we have;"² or that he can never admire their excellencies enough.³ If these statements are too general to be taken absolutely, it is not impossible to find those which are stated unequivocally. One will, perhaps, be sufficient; - "For in the drama," says Dryden, "we have not arrived to the pitch of Shakespere and Ben Jonson."⁴ Remembering that he placed Beaumont and Fletcher below Shakespere and Jonson in very few things, equal to them in many ways, and above both in a few, we can but conclude that, in the opinion of the greatest critic of the seventeenth century, they were at least, equal to the best English dramatists.

THOMAS RYMER

I have said that Rymer represents a tendency, or school, favoring the Classic Rules applied to the English drama by what he calls "common sense". His standard is the judgment of a reasonable man, his method is analytical and comparative, and his language and ideas are markedly concrete. He wants poetry to picture very faithfully the conditions of actual life, without a very noticeable amount of poetic artifice.⁵ Perhaps

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1. Preface to Troilus and Cressida - 1679 - Ker, I:211.
2. An Essay of Dramatic Poesy - Ker, I:56.
3. Essay on the Dramatic Poesy of the Last Age - 1672 - Ker, I:171.
4. Dedication of Examen Poeticum - 1693 - Ker, II:14.
5. Spingarn, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, gives a full discussion of these principles, I:LXIII-LXXXI.

he is best known by his criticism of Othello, which is as follows;¹

1. Certainly never was any play fraught, like this of Othello, with improbabilities.
2. There can be nothing in the characters, either for the profit, or to delight an Audience.
3. But from such Characters, we need not expect many (thoughts) that are either true, or fine, or noble.
4. In the Noighing of an Horse, or in the growling of a Mastiff, there is a meaning, there is as lively expression, and may I say, more humanity, than many times in the Tragical flights of Shakespeare.

Scarcely less severe is his censure of Jonson's Catiline, or of Beaumont and Fletcher's The Maid's Tragedy, of which last he concludes, "nothing in History was ever so unnatural, nothing in Nature was ever so improbable, as we find the whole conduct of this Tragedy, - - so far are we from anything accurate and Philosophical as Poetry requires."²

Rymer thought little more of the Restoration drama than he did of the Elizabethan drama. He wished to see put into effect, " a law for Acting the Rehearsal once a week, to keep us in our senses, and secure us against the Noise and Nonsense, the Farce and Fustian which, in the name of Tragedy, have so long invaded, and usurp our Theatre."³

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1. Short View of Tragedy - Thomas Rymer - London - 1693, p., 92-5.
2. Tragedies of the Last Age - T. Rymer - Spingarn, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century - II:190.
3. Short View of Tragedy - T. Rymer, p., 158.

Such sentiments expressed today would brand the man owning them as either a very ignorant man, or a fanatic. That he was not the first, is evidenced by the testimony of Dryden, who revered Mr. Rymer's 'Learning', Though he detested his 'Ill-Nature and Arrogance'. Moreover Rymer's harsh criticism of English drama was not done blindly, for he had a theory behind it. While he revered the Ancients, he was not, in theory at least, a blind follower of their Rules. He was willing to pass by the mechanical part of Tragedies (the proportions, the unities, and outward regularities), if the failure to observe these beauties was compensated for by the presence of the Essential of Tragedy, the Fable, or Plot, which he called the Soul of Tragedy.¹ In his Tragedies of the Last Age Reviewed upon which all the above material is based he asserts that he has "chiefly consider'd the Fable or Plot, which all conclude to be the Soul of a Tragedy; which with the Ancients is always found to be a reasonable Soul, but with us for the most part a brutish and often worse than brutish.

And certainly there is not requir'd much Learning, or that a man must be some Aristotle, and Doctor of Subtilties, to form a right judgement in this particular: common sense suffices."² To us it seems that the sense which sufficed him was indeed an extremely common one.

Rymer, however, had enough Ancient learning to enable him to discuss intelligently some of the unsettled questions of

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1. Tragedies of the Last Age . . . T. Rymer - Spingarn - Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century - Oxford - II:183.
2. Ibid., II:184.

his century. He mentions such problems as the "distinction that is to be made between what pleases naturally in it self, and what pleases upon account of Machines, Actors, Dances, and circumstances which are merely accidental to the Tragedy."¹ He also talks of the difference in men's natures according to the meridian upon which they live, Reason and Fancy in their relation to Poetry, and the effect of the Rules upon freedom in writing. The Poetical decency (called decorum of the stage, by Dryden) of The Maid's Tragedy receives a sharp, cutting treatment, which is probably deserved, if one grants Rymer's premises. Since we do not grant them today, we do not feel that they should be applied so harshly to the Elizabethan drama.

We have at hand but one² of Rymer's extended references to the work of Beaumont and Fletcher,- an inquiry into the play just mentioned, The Maid's Tragedy. We have seen that Rymer thought this tragedy very unnatural and improbable. Let him name some of the faults specifically.

The first quarrel which he has with the authors is regarding the title. After giving five possible titles he dismisses the whole question without having reached any conclusion except that he does not like the name of the play. Then the King, whom Rymer is pleased to call "King Anonymous," displeases him throughout. "Certainly", says Rymer, "God never made a King with so little wit, nor the devil with so little grace, as is this King Anonymous." Rymer's analysis has, at least, the merit of being complete. Every detail is carefully

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1. Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, II:184.
2. Ibid., II:191 and following.

mentioned and considered. The authors are severely blamed for allowing their King to stumble into such clear and evident trouble. Rymer thinks that any man, not to say King, could have seen and avoided the trap which Beaumont and Fletcher laid for their King. He says that Fancy overcame Reason when they created him.

Evadne, the evil woman of the play, who is false to her husband, is at one time bashful, at another openly impudent, and finally, kills the King because he had led her into evil ways. Besides noting this inconsistency, Rymer finds fault with her modesty, even while he admits that she is from the beginning the evil, immoral woman of the tragedy. Neglecting to mention the fact that Beaumont and Fletcher draw characters which are extremely bad so that they may make more effective contrasts with the good characters, Rymer deals very harshly with Evadne; - "And for Evadne's part, did Hell ever give reception to such a Monster, or Cerberus ever wag his tayl at an impudence so sacred?" One would almost think that Rymer believed the authors' purpose in the tragedy was the creation of the evil characters. After dealing with all the details of the relations between the King, Evadne, and Evadne's husband, Amintor, Rymer concludes that the King was not to blame, and that he did not deserve the punishment meted out to him - death at the hands of the woman he had wronged. Geneste would recall him to himself by suggesting that had it been Rymer's own sister who had been seduced as Evadne was, perhaps he would have felt differently about it.¹

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1. Geneste, Some Account of the English Stage - I:219.

The highly moral character of the play, Aspatia, the wronged maiden, who gives the name to the tragedy, pleases Rymer little better than does Evadne, for he sees in her only a pitiful beauty calling for compassion. Aspatia is not a strong character, but one can not think Rymer's sarcasm fully deserved: "Never did Amintas or Pastor fido know anything so tender, nor were the Arcadian Hills ever water'd with the tears of a creature so innocent. Pretty Lamb! how mournfully it bleats! it needs no articulate voice to move our compassion; it seeks no shades but under the dismal Yew, and browses only on Willow-garlands; yet it can speak for a kiss or so;

Asp. I'll trouble you no more, yet I will take
A parting kiss, and will not be deny'd:
You'l come, my Lord, and with the Virgins weep
When I am laid in earth, though your self
Can know no pitty. Thus I wind my self
Into this Willow-garland, etc.

At his rate of tattle she runs on, and never known when she has said enough."

That Aspatia, a Lord's daughter, brought up at Court, should act her part in the bedchamber of the Lady to whom she has given place, should bemoan her fate to the Crides-maids, fawn upon the man that forsook her, then use a sword and her foot upon that man, and still later call it a blessing to die at that man's hand, Rymer says may be Romance, but not Nature.

To Rymer the most displeasing character in the play is Amintor, the man who at the King's command, deserts Aspatia, to whom he is engaged, and marries Evadne, the King's mistress. Rymer quarrels with the lack of reason shown for Amintor's acts.

with the breaking of the rules of Poetic justice, and with his lack of common sense. Whatever may have been Rymer's basis in drawing these conclusions, he denies Beaumont and Fletcher the right, usually granted dramatists, of creating a country of their own, where the word of the King is absolute. This Divine Right of their King, which Beaumont and Fletcher work out in this play, was not even foreign to the actual world in which Rymer lived. Rymer says that Amintor is made to take insults which no flesh and blood would take, but he forgets that if we accept the play at all, we must make certain allowances for stage conventions, as we do for every stage presentation. Such criticism would seem harsh indeed, did we not recall his remarks upon Jonson's plays, and upon Shakespere's Othello. Remembering these, we are willing to allow a certain latitude to Rymer in his criticism of Beaumont and Fletcher.

Although Rymer is hostile to Beaumont and Fletcher, it must be rembered that he thinks little better of any drama. He was determined to find the blemishes, and to avoid the beauties of all those plays which he criticised. We are indebted to him for showing us that Beaumont and Fletcher sometimes created characters which were extravagant, and that they sometimes allowed their imagination to carry their plots beyond the bounds of verisimilitude, but we could wish that he had had these/sentiments of Thomas Carlyle: "In looking at a finished Drama, it were nowise meet that the spectator first of all got behind the scenes, and saw the burnt-corks, brayed-resin, thunder-barrels, and withered hunger-bitten men and women, of which such heroic work was made But on the whole,

repress, O reader, that too-insatiable scientific curiosity of thine; let thy aesthetic feeling first have play"¹

JEREMY COLLIER

In truth there was very little of this esthetic feeling to be found in the last three-quarters of the seventeenth century. It seems not improbable, however, that through Milton, with his Classicism, with his sound judgment of Tragedy (Preface to Samson Agonistes), with his true and noble Puritanism, might be traced an almost invisible esthetic element, connecting the times of early Puritanism, before the Commonwealth with the exaggerated criticism shown in the last great critic of the century, Jeremy Collier. But such work is too remote from the problem immediately at hand, the reputation of Beaumont and Fletcher, to receive more than mere suggestion here.

This higher esthetic taste of Milton, granting its existence, had little influence upon plays and playwrights. The political revolution of 1688 did not change the public playhouses very much. The stage was still very licentious, and the drama as a whole was quite corrupt. It needed to be directly and openly attacked, in order to get some improvement. The proposal of a very radical change was necessary, in order that public opinion might change somewhat. This was the task which Jeremy Collier began in 1698.

Collier was unfair in his discussions of the immorality of the stage. He did not hesitate to pervert facts in

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1. The Diamond Necklace - T. Carlyle - Critical and Miscellaneous Essays - London - 1899, III:359.

order to establish his point. But he is important in that he worked a great change in public opinion regarding dramatic ideals. While he was especially vituperative against the drama as it had flourished after the Restoration, he also criticised severely the drama of all ages. The Ancients and the Elizabethans received their full share of censure.

But all this would not be important enough for a place here if Collier had not placed Beaumont and Fletcher on a higher plane of morality than any of the other dramatists which he discussed. Beaumont and Fletcher are so often accused of being too immoral to read, that to hear them defended by a clergyman is strange indeed. Yet Collier praises them for three things: their proper use of profanity, their treatment of the clergymen introduced into their plays, and for their encouragement of morality in general.

As to profanity, Collier says that Dryden is the greatest offender; "Shakespeare is comparatively sober, Ben Johnson is still more regular; And as for Beaumont and Fletcher, in their plays, they are commonly Profligate Persons that Swear, and even those are reprov'd for't. Besides, the Oaths are not so full of Hell and Defiance, as in the Moderns."¹ Collier thought a drama commendable if whatever sin appeared in it was punished. If his defense of Beaumont and Fletcher makes us smile, we may none the less believe in the sincerity of the man, who, in giving voice to those sentiments, but took the attitude of a large class of his contemporaries.

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1. A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage - Jeremy Collier - London, 1699, p., 57.

Collier finds more to blame in Beaumont and Fletcher, when he considers their abuse of the clergy; but he excuses this in them as well as in Shakespere and Jonson. These two, and Beaumont and Fletcher especially, are sharply contrasted with the Restoration dramatists, who, he says, show no respect at all for religion. He gives several specific illustrations from Beaumont and Fletcher, in which their treatment of religion in general, and of the clergy in particular, is commendable.

"Beaumont and Fletcher", he says, "in the Faithful Shepherdess, The False One, A Wife for a Month, and The Knight of Malta, give us both Priests and Bishops, part Heathen and part Christian: But all of them save their Reputation, and make a Creditable Appearance. The Priests in The Scornful Lady, and the Spanish Curate are ill used. The first is made a Fool, and the other a Knave. Indeed, they seem to be brought in on purpose to make sport, and disserve Religion."¹ It will be noticed that Collier quotes four plays for which he commends Beaumont and Fletcher, while he quotes but half that number in which their attitude toward the clergy does not please him. The four Elizabethans, Shakespere, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, are given almost equal precedence over the Moderns in teaching the "Principal End of Poesy, to inform Man in the best Reason of Living."² Collier says that if there were farther reason for quotation, after instancing Jonson's Fox, and Alchemist, and Shakespere's character of Falstaff, he could show many in-

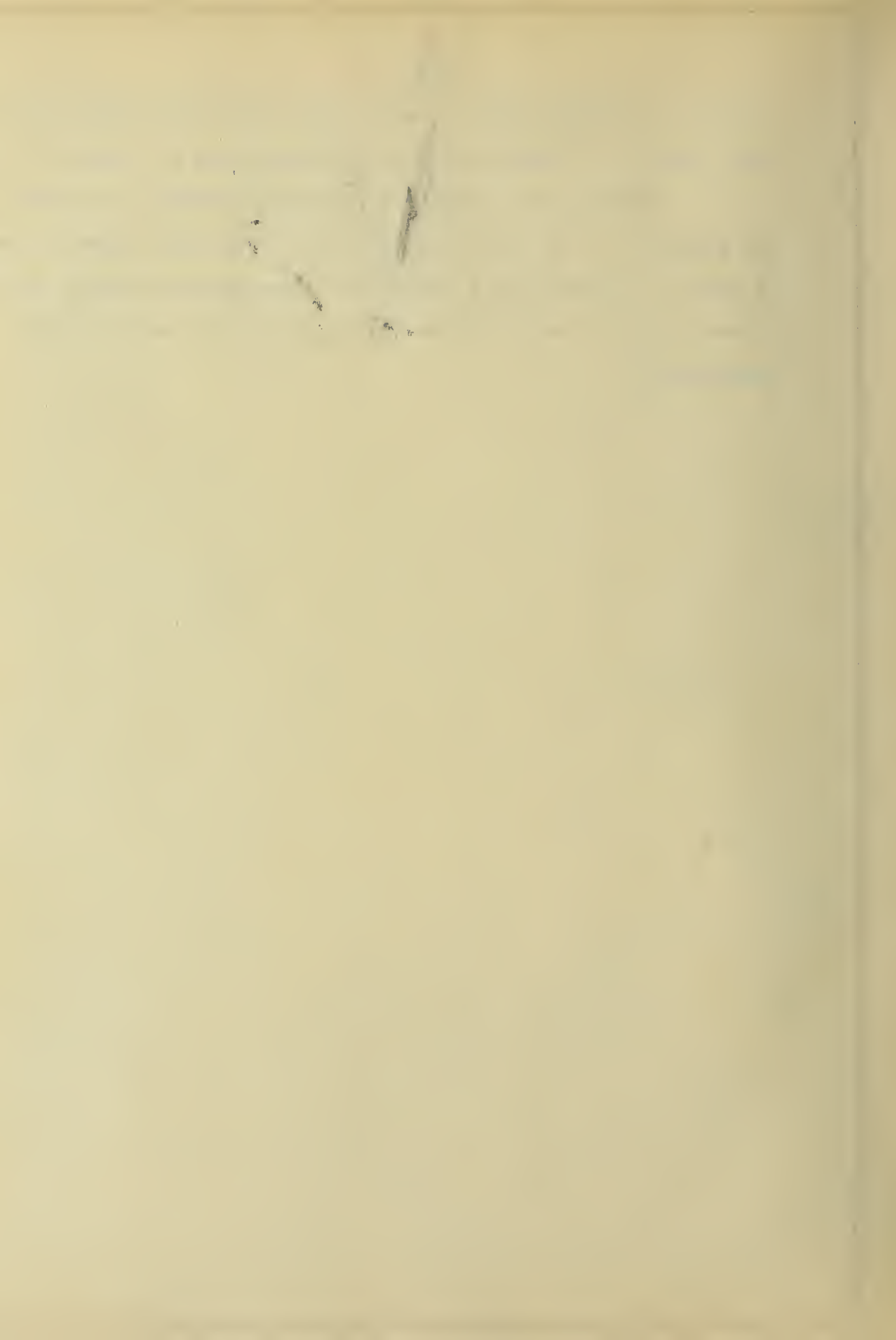
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1. A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage - Jeremy Collier - 1699, p., 57.

2. Ibid., p., 158.

stances in Beaumont and Fletcher, where the profligate characters repent, and leave off their intemperance and immorality.

Allowing for Collier's own intemperance, in speech and passion, we may still allow him to represent a great portion of public opinion at the end of the seventeenth century which placed Beaumont and Fletcher very high in the rank of moral dramatists.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

We have found that Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, Philaster, The Maid's Tragedy, King and No King, and others went through more editions in the seventeenth century than was usual for an Elizabethan play. This could not have been because they were more particularly library plays than were those of Shakespere and Jonson; they were not. We have Dryden's and Thorndike's assertions that they wrote plays which were among the best acting plays produced by Elizabethans. We have found further, that Shakespere had 19, Jonson 9, and Beaumont and Fletcher 32 plays revived between 1660 and the end of the century. Perhaps it is unfair to Jonson to compare his revived plays with those of Beaumont and Fletcher, because occasional drama, the Masque, made up so large a part of his work. Shakespere, however, must bear comparison openly, for he wrote tragedy, tragi-comedy, and comedy, as did Beaumont and Fletcher. The fact simply stands that his appeal was not so great in the seventeenth century, especially in the latter half, as was that of our two playwrights. In addition to this, the facts that Beaumont and Fletcher first used anti-masque, and that they taught Shakespere and others how to incorporate masque elements into the regular drama, ^{and} is enough to warrant the statement that popularly, as far as stage success and theatre approval go, they were first of the Elizabethans in the century following their first successful production in 1611.

As regards the standing of these authors among

contemporary playwrights and poets, and among later poets and literary men, we must come to the same conclusion. We have found Jonson proudly making use of Beaumont's judgment in writing his plays; Shakespere collaborating with Fletcher; and Shirley, with others of his lesser rank, joining with Fletcher in a few plays. We have quoted Waller, Lovelace, and Denham, with many other poets of high standing in their century, showing that they thought Beaumont a better poet than Greece ever gave birth to, certainly destined to outshine Chaucer; and Fletcher's wit and love scenes better than Shakespere's or Jonson's. We have read verses from scholarly Bishops praising Beaumont and Fletcher for their purity of thought and language. In the later part of the century, when satire was so prominent in literature, we find Beaumont and Fletcher criticised, but we do not find them receiving more adverse criticism than other Elizabethans; in fact, if anything, they are criticised a trifle less severely. In an age when politics and letters were more closely associated than ever before or since, the leading literary and political lights revived many plays of these two men. We have no hesitation in saying that among the dramatists, poets, preachers, scholars, and literary politicians of the seventeenth century, Beaumont and Fletcher were considered to be the first poets and dramatists of the age.

It has already been suggested that it is unfair to compare Jonson with Beaumont and Fletcher, because so many of his productions were masques, written for specific occasions, and of course never to be revived. We must give Jonson the honor of being first among masque writers, but as is so often

the case, it is not the one who makes first use of a thing but the one who best applies that thing to contemporary needs, that reaps the greatest benefits from it. This is what Beaumont and Fletcher did with the masque, as was suggested above. They placed masque elements in their plays in such a way as to appeal to the taste of the age, and still keep the form of the regular drama. This gave actors an opportunity for making names for themselves through Beaumont and Fletcher, which was not open to them through the works of Jonson. As for Shakespere, we have seen that the masque element, the playful element, the lighted ingredient of drama, had the greatest appeal to the audiences of this century. Since Shakespere did not succeed in this so well as did Beaumont and Fletcher, they stand almost head and shoulders above him in the production of well-known actors. They were lucky enough, or shall we say able, enough to strike the note that appealed in their century, and so we find it easily possible to place them above all seventeenth century contenders, for the honor of producing the greatest number of really great actors.

Among the critics of the century we find two conflicting elements - Puritanism, and the Restoration spirit. Those are two radically opposed trends of thought, and in this century both are found at their extremes, there is little finality about either. Consequently, we find the fierce outbursts of Prynne, Rymer, and Collier, on the one hand, matched by the immorality and obscenity of the Restoration drama. We find one group calling for the abolition of every trace of the drama and stage, and the other group greatly pleased with the public presentation

of the most indecent drama in literary history. But, generalizing from Rymer and Collier, we may safely say that the one finds nothing worse in Beaumont and Fletcher than he does in Shakespeare and Jonson, while the other concludes that their morality is above that of Shakespeare, and Jonson, that their profanity is less indecent, and that they teach the principal end of poetry just as well as either. Dryden, in his saner criticism, the truest critic of the century, places Beaumont and Fletcher's plots above Shakespeare's, the conversation of their gentlemen in polite life as the best in the language, their wit, gaiety, and pathos as best suiting the universal feeling in all men, and their language as the most perfect among Englishmen. More particularly, Dryden names one play from Shakespeare, (Merry Wives of Windsor), and one from Beaumont and Fletcher (The Scornful Lady), as examples of almost exact plot; and three of Beaumont and Fletcher's (Rollo, King and No King, The Maid's Tragedy), with two of Jonson's (The Alchemist, The Silent Woman), as representations of complete plots, worked out to the most perfect close. Dryden also thinks Shakespeare better in his scenes of love between man and man, but that when one goes beyond friendship to love in the usual sense of that term, between man and woman, that we must allow Fletcher to have surpassed even Shakespeare. Dryden's final verdict seems to be that Shakespeare and Fletcher are unquestionably above all other English dramatists, but that in the end Shakespeare must be given a shade of preference. It is harder to sum up the evidence, and give a final verdict, from the critics of the century, than from any other class of men

considered in this paper, for while we have Rymer's and Collier's harsh remarks opposed to Dryden's saner judgments, we have also to face the fact that Rymer and Collier had almost as much learning, and almost as much critical ability as did Dryden. Taking all things into consideration, we can do no less than say that Beaumont and Fletcher must hold equal rank with Shakespere, and Jonson, at least so far as the critics of the century are concerned. Finally, drawing our conclusions from the elements considered, which are not to be considered as complete, but only as an attempt to get at some of the facts, and some of the tendencies of the century, we conclude from such canvass as we have made, that among the audiences, among the poets and dramatists, among the actors, and among the critics of the seventeenth century, Beaumont and Fletcher were thought to be in the front rank of seventeenth century dramatists.

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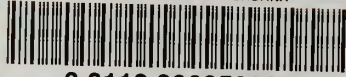
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